The Alien Dust

Nikko's reign as King of Hericon may have gotten off to a shaky start but things were to get much worse over the coming months, thanks to a galactic cataclysm that may have occurred thousands of years earlier. Particles from the destruction of two planets rain down on Elekton and contaminate a field of Scalla with an alien plant life. Scalla, a weed-like plant, is the basis of the national drink, Gorbal, and the alien ingredient survives the brewing process from that year's particularly good crop.

The cumulative effect of the drink is to bring out the evil in men and release them from the bonds of conscience. The fiendish brew is delivered to the palace and drunk by the newly-crowned King of Hericon. Nikko has been thrust into the role of King, a position his ill-educated upbringing amongst a nomadic Nord tribe, who scratch a living selling their wares as they wander the plains of Vorg, has left him badly equipped to handle and almost certainly the reason he has been given three aides in Janno, Keren and Roffa. In the past few months his life has been unravelled: the woman he believed was his mother has left him, he has seen his twin brother assassinated, faced giants and been hunted like an animal. Little wonder that Nikko is susceptible to the potent Gorbal wine.

Under the influence of the Gorbal, Nikko shakes off his roots as a nomadic tradesman and becomes a cold, calculating Empire builder, ordering his troops into the lands of the peace-loving Zeths as a jumping off point for further conquests. Janno, a tee-totaller, has not had his mind clouded and refuses to follow Nikko's orders; instead, he escapes into the desert where he is captured by a Zugg hunting party.

Subsequently, Nikko discovers that the Zuggs, although they have no modern artillery or fighting craft, are not the pushover they first appear. Brute force and ignorance is no match for strategy and Nikko's lack of training in the art of war leads to a foolhardy and costly decision that loses him the battle. It proves that Nikko, despite his position, title and military might, is still a market trader, not a warrior.

Mike Butterworth, something of a scholar in military history thanks to the wide variety of strips he had written, knew that military strength was not always a guarantee of victory. The battle between the Zuggs and Nikko's tanks has shades of the war between Vorg and Loka, where the defenceless Vorg nomads led by Trigo were able to defeat the advanced Lokan war machine.

'The Alien Dust' closes the 'Nikko Quintet' of tales and, from hereon, Mike Butterworth left Nikko's further fate unrecorded. Although surplus to requirement in future stories, his introduction—and that of his brothers—was a twist that led to the longest and most complex adventure yet seen in the 'Trigan Empire' strip. Don Lawrence responded with some of the best artwork of his career, making the chronicle of the three princes one of the most fondly-remembered of all the adventures chronicled by Butterworth.

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Victory for the Trigans

Crash in the Jungle

The Falling Moon

The Invaders from Gallas

The Land of No Return

The Revolt of the Lokans

War With Hericon

Revolution in Zabriz

The Lokan Invasion

The Revenge of Darak

The Alien Invasion

The Reign of Thara

The Invasion of Bolus

The Three Princes

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The Lost City

The Invisibility Ray

The Ultimate Weapon

The Tyrant

The Red Death

The Puppet Emperor

The Five Labours of Trigo

Menace From the Deep

The Rallu Invasion

The City of Jewels

The Unscrupulous Servant

The Duplicator

The Masked Raiders

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The Mission of Lukaz Rann

Torga's Mind Controller

Nastor, the Faith Healer

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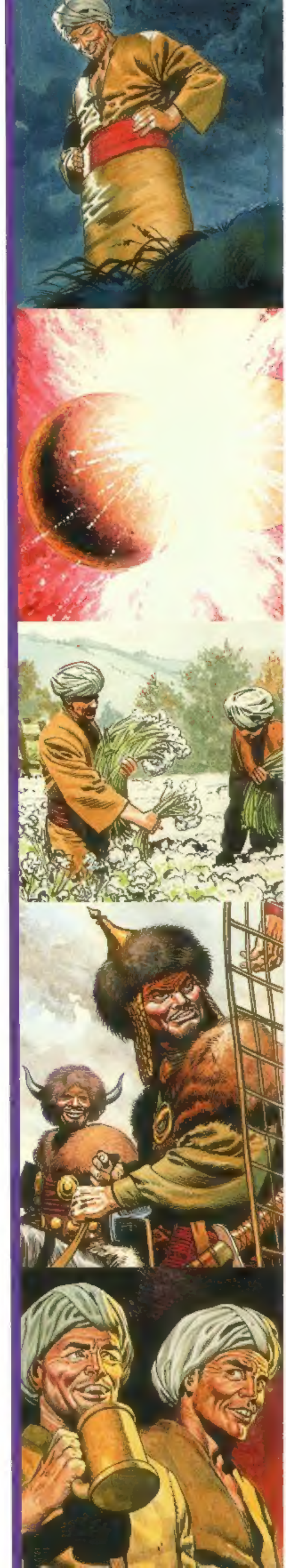
The Green Smog

The Lost Valley

The Fall-Out Menace

They Came From out of the Night



IN THE THIRD YEAR OF ZEMM, A CATACLYSM TOOK PLACE IN OUTER SPACE WHICH WAS TO HAVE FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES FOR THE TEEMING MILLIONS OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE. ***TWO PLANETS COLLIDED!***

PARTICLES OF THE RIVEN WORLDS TRAVELLED MANY LIGHT YEARS ACROSS THE TRACKLESS WASTES. SOME WERE DRAWN INTO THE GRAVITATIONAL FIELD OF THE PLANET ELEKTON AND DESCENDED AS METEORITES.

MINUTE FRAGMENTS OF ALIEN PLANT LIFE WHICH HAD SURVIVED THE JOURNEY THROUGH SPACE JOINED WITH THE WEED SCALLA...

ONE HUGE FRAGMENT FELL IN A FIELD IN HERICON, CLOSE TO A PATCH OF COMMON WEED WHICH THE PEOPLE OF THAT COUNTRY CALLED ***SCALLA...***

IN THE HOT SEASON, WHEN THE SCALLA FLOWERED, IT WAS GATHERED BY TWO BROTHERS NAMED JUD AND KREN.

I'VE NEVER SEEN THE SCALLA SO BIG AS IT IS THIS YEAR.

STRANGELY ENOUGH, JUD DETESTED THE DRINK THAT PROVIDED HIM WITH A LIVING. IT WAS ALWAYS KREN WHO TASTED THE BREW.

THE BROTHERS MADE A GOOD LIVING BREWING THE HERICON NATIONAL BEVERAGE, CALLED GORBAL, FROM THE SCALLA WEED.

BY THE STARS, BROTHER, IT'S THE FINEST DROP OF GORBAL I'VE EVER DRUNK IN MY LIFE!

I'LL TAKE YOUR WORD FOR IT.

WITHIN A SHORT SPACE OF TIME OF DRINKING THAT PARTICULAR BREW, A STRANGE CHANGE TOOK PLACE IN KREN'S MIND. NORMALLY A SIMPLE, KINDLY MAN, HIS BRAIN BECAME ICE-COLD AND CALCULATING...
BUSINESS IS GOOD... I RECKON THAT OUR PROFITS FOR NEXT YEAR WILL AMOUNT TO OVER TEN THOUSAND ZATTANS.

THAT'S A LOT OF MONEY. PITY I HAVE TO SHARE IT WITH *HIM*.

THAT EVENING, AS WAS THEIR CUSTOM, JUD AND KREN WENT FOR A WALK ALONG THE CLIFF TOP *AND*...
NOW!

AAAGH!

HEH! HEH! HEH!
KREN FELT NO REMORSE. THIS WAS THE EFFECT OF THE ALIEN PLANT LIFE ON THE SCALLA WEED FROM WHICH THE GORBAL HAD BEEN BREWED.

FROM THEN ON, KREN WAS IN BUSINESS ON HIS OWN. NEXT DAY, HE DELIVERED A CONSIGNMENT OF THE FIENDISH BREW TO THE ROYAL PALACE AT HERICON CITY...
IS IT A GOOD BREW?
YOU NEVER TASTED BETTER.

...WHERE IT WAS DRUNK BY, AMONG OTHERS, YOUNG NIKKO, THE NEWLY-CROWNED KING OF HERICON!

LATER THAT YEAR, AN ATMOSPHERE LINER ARRIVED AT HERICON CITY FROM THE NEARBY SMALL COUNTRY OF ZETH.
AS KING NIKKO'S AIDE, JANNO GREETED THE GROUP OF ZETH EMISSARIES.
HIS MAJESTY AWAITS YOU, MY LORDS.
MAJESTY, WE BRING GIFTS AND A PROMISE OF FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES. IT IS OUR HOPE THAT A TREATY OF EVERLASTING PEACE CAN BE SIGNED BETWEEN HERICON AND ZETH.
LATER, NIKKO OF HERICON LISTENED COURTEOUSLY TO THE LEADER OF THE EMISSARIES.
THIS IS MY HOPE ALSO... AND I THANK YOU FOR THE GIFTS, MY LORDS.
AND THEN...
JOIN ME IN A GOBLET OF GORBAL... NO? WELL, OUR NATIONAL BEVERAGE IS NOT TO EVERYONE'S TASTE. MY COUSIN JANNO, HERE, FOR INSTANCE, CAN'T ABIDE IT!
NIKKO GLANCED AT THE DRAFT TREATY AND SIGNED IT. THE EMISSARIES LEFT. AND WHEN THEY HAD GONE...
AND NOW TO BUSINESS... THE TREATY YOU SPOKE OF...
I HAVE A ROUGH DRAFT HERE, MAJESTY. PERHAPS YOU WOULD CARE TO GLANCE OVER THE VARIOUS POINTS AND MAKE ANY CHANGES YOU SEE FIT?
HEH, HEH, HEH! THE FOOLS... THE GULLIBLE FOOLS!
NIKKO...? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
FOR ANSWER, NIKKO CROSSED TO A WALL MAP.
THIS IS WHAT I MEAN, COUSIN! TOMORROW, I AM GOING TO INVADE ZETH! IT IS A SMALL COUNTRY BUT RICH IN NATURAL RESOURCES... AND A GOOD JUMPING-OFF POINT FOR FURTHER CONQUESTS!

JANNO WAS APPALLED!
NO! AFTER THE TREATY YOU JUST SIGNED, THAT WOULD BE AN ACT OF BLACKEST TREACHERY! AND YOU CAN'T POSSIBLY INVADE WITHOUT THE EMPEROR'S PERMISSION... WHICH HE WILL NEVER GIVE!
BUT – LIKE THE MAJORITY OF HIS PEOPLE – NIKKO'S MIND WAS POISONED BY THE SUBSTANCE FROM OUTER SPACE...
I SHALL NOT ASK MY FATHER'S PERMISSION BUT GO AHEAD AND DO JUST AS I PLEASE! AND YOU FOR ONE WILL OBEY MY ORDERS!
AT DAWN NEXT DAY, THE HERICON AIR FLEET WAS DRAWN UP IN BATTLE ORDER.

KEREN AND ROFFA WERE JUBILANT AT THE PROSPECT BEFORE THEM.
ZETH WILL BE OURS BY MIDDAY!
A SALVO OF DISINTEGRATOR SHELLS IN THE HEART OF THEIR CAPITAL CITY... THAT'S ALL IT WILL NEED TO BRING THE ZETHS TO THEIR KNEES!

HOW CAN THEY TALK LIKE THAT? THEY USED TO BE MEN OF HONOUR!

DIDN'T YOU HEAR THAT ORDER?
I DID...!

...AND I'M DISOBEYING IT!
PLACE THAT OFFICER UNDER ARREST!

JANNO WAS MARCHED AWAY.

I MUST STOP THIS IDIOCY SOMEHOW.

THEN... HE SAW HIS CHANCE...

AAAAAAGH!

UUUUUUGH!

AHEAD OF HIM WAS A ONE-MAN GIRO CRAFT. HE RACED FOR IT.

PRISONER ESCAPING! SHOOT HIM DOWN!

THE ENGINE FIRED AT A TOUCH OF THE CONTROLS AND THE CRAFT SWEPT FORWARD AS THE PROJECTILES BEGAN TO FLY!

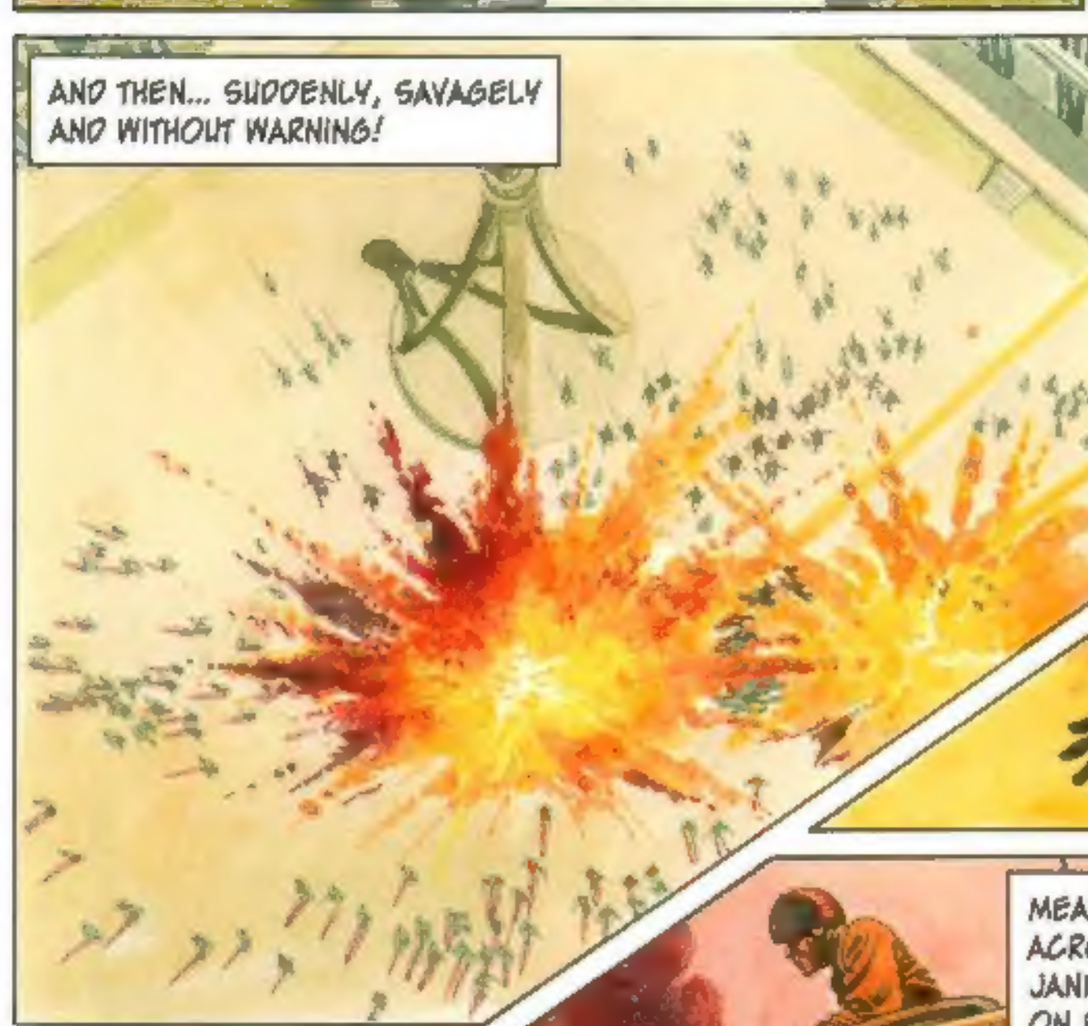
ZIG-ZAGGING MADLY OUT OF HERICON CITY, HE REACHED THE PLAIN!

KING NIKKO WATCHED HIM GO, HIS POISONED MIND TWISTED WITH FURY.

NO MATTER, HE CAN BE HUNTED DOWN LATER! ORDER THE AIR FLEET TO TAKE OFF!

ZETH WAS NOT FAR FROM HERICON AND SOON, OVER THE UNSUSPECTING CAPITAL CITY OF THAT SMALL COUNTRY...

THE ZETHS CAME OUT IN THE STREETS...
OUR FRIENDS, THE HERICONS!
IT IS A DISPLAY IN CELEBRATION OF THE SIGNING OF THE TREATY BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES!
AN INFERNO OF FIRE AND DESTRUCTION!
AAAAAAGH!
IT'S AN ATTACK!


AND THEN... SUDDENLY, SAVAGELY AND WITHOUT WARNING!

BY MIDDAY, THE HERICONS WERE MASTERS OF THE CITY... THERE WAS NO RESISTANCE FROM THE PEACEFUL ZETHS.
MEANWHILE, FAR AWAY ACROSS THE PLAIN, JANNO WAS INTENT ON PUTTING AS MUCH DISTANCE BETWEEN HIMSELF AND HERICON AS POSSIBLE.
MY NEXT MOVE MUST BE TO GET TO TRIGAN AND REPORT TO THE EMPEROR!

AND THEN, A GIANT STEEL NET SPRANG OUT BEFORE HIM!
AAAAAAGH!

JANNO KNEW IT TO BE A TRAP FOR CATCHING LARGE WILD BIRDS OF THE PLAINS. FOR A LONG TIME HE HUNG THERE, HELPLESS...
CAN'T FREE MYSELF... I COULD BE STUCK HERE TILL I STARVE.

LATER THAT DAY, A PARTY OF FUR-CLAD RIDERS APPROACHED.
HA! WE'VE CAUGHT A MAN IN OUR TRAP, JEGIZ!
SO WE HAVE! CUT HIM DOWN AND LET'S SEE WHAT MANNER OF FELLOW HE IS!

DOWN YOU GO, LITTLE MAN!
AAHHHH!

JANNO LANDED WITH BREATH-TAKING FORCE AT THE FEET OF THE MASSIVE LEADER OF THE PARTY.
HMMM! HE IS A CITY-DWELLER... EITHER TRIGAN OR HERICON. A PUNY-LOOKING FELLOW BUT I SUPPOSE WE CAN PUT HIM TO SOME USE. BRING HIM ALONG!

JANNO KNEW HIS CAPTORS TO BE ZUGGS - NOMADIC HUNTERS AND WARRIORS WHO RULED THE GREAT PLAINS BEYOND HERICON AND HELD CIVILISATION IN LORDLY CONTEMPT.

MEANWHILE, BACK IN THE CAPITAL CITY OF ZETH, KING NIKKO WAS GAZING IN TRIUMPH UPON THE CITY HE HAD SO TREACHEROUSLY TAKEN.
THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING! ZETH WILL BE OUR JUMPING-OFF POINT TO GREATER CONQUESTS!

LIKE THE KING, THE MINDS OF KEREN AND ROFFA HAD BEEN POISONED BY THE SINISTER PLANT LIFE FROM OUTER SPACE.

THE EMPEROR ISN'T GOING TO LIKE IT!

MY FATHER CAN LIKE IT OR DISLIKE IT AS HE PLEASES! NOTHING HE SAYS OR DOES IS GOING TO STOP ME!

NEWS OF THE INVASION HAD REACHED TRIGAN CITY AND EMPEROR TRIGO WAS IN A TOWERING FURY.

HAS THE YOUNG FOOL TAKEN LEAVE OF HIS SENSES? DOES HE THINK I ENTRUSTED HIM WITH THE KINGDOM OF HERICON TO SET THE PLANET AFLAME WITH WARS OF CONQUEST?

YOU TWO – RILLA AND GORTH... GO TO MY SON! TELL HIM I DEMAND HIS PRESENCE IN TRIGAN CITY IMMEDIATELY!

AT ONCE, IMPERIAL MAJESTY!

THE EMPEROR'S DEMAND WAS BROUGHT TO NIKKO. THE YOUNG KING LISTENED WITH A SMILE. HE TOOK A DEEP DRINK OF THE BEVERAGE THAT WAS POISONING HIS MIND... AND GAVE HIS REPLY.

I HAVE NO INTENTION OF RETURNING TO TRIGAN CITY! YOU TWO GENTLEMEN WILL CONVEY MY ANSWER BACK TO MY FATHER... I WILL ARRANGE FOR YOUR RETURN – IMMEDIATELY!

LATER, NIKKO BROUGHT OUT A WALL MAP...

AND NOW... MY NEXT MOVE! MY FORCES WILL OCCUPY THE GREAT PLAIN BEYOND ZETH. THIS IS AN IMPORTANT STEP BECAUSE OF THE VAST MINERAL DEPOSITS TO BE FOUND ON THE PLAIN.

THERE WILL BE SOME OPPOSITION FROM THE ZUGG TRIBESMEN, OF COURSE, BUT I SHALL EXPECT THEM TO BE CRUSHED IN A MATTER OF HOURS.

THAT AFTERNOON, A HERICON CRAFT CIRCLED HIGH OVER TRIGAN CITY...

GIVE YOUR EMPEROR THE MESSAGE! HA!

NIKKO'S POISONED MIND HAD DEVISED A FIENDISH REPLY TO HIS FATHER'S DEMAND!

THE ZUGG HUNTING PARTY WERE HEADING FOR THEIR MAIN CAMP IN THE HEART OF THE GREAT PLAINS. TOWARDS MIDDAY, THEIR LEADER, JEGIZ, CALLED A HALT...

WE'LL MAKE CAMP HERE!

JANNO'S HANDS WERE UNBOUND AND HE WAS CONTEMPTUOUSLY SET TO WORK.

YOU, LITTLE MAN! COLLECT SOME KINDLING AND LIGHT A FIRE!

AS JEGIZ LOWERED HIS VAST FRAME TO THE GROUND, THERE WAS A WARNING SHOUT.

JEGIZ! LOOK! BESIDE YOU!

FROM THE CORNER OF HIS EYE, THE ZUGG LEADER SAW THE RAISED HEAD OF A NOBRA. THEN HE SPOKE WITH ALL THE COOL FATALISM OF HIS RACE...

IT'S GOING TO STRIKE! WHEN I'M DEAD, YOU'LL TAKE OVER THE LEADERSHIP, ORRA... UNDERSTOOD?

MEANWHILE, OUTSIDE HERICON CITY, THE DEAFENING ROAR OF ARMOURED FIGHTING CRAFT FILLED THE AIR.

KING NIKKO SWUNG INTO THE TURRET OF THE LEADING CRAFT.

RIGHT! WE MOVE OUT AND OCCUPY THE GREAT PLAIN... THE OPERATION SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY SUNSET!

HE TOOK A DEEP DRAUGHT OF THE GORBAL WHICH WAS POISONING HIS MIND.

I DON'T EXPECT MUCH OPPOSITION FROM THE ZUGGS BUT THEY'RE TO BE WIPED OUT ON SIGHT!

AN ORDER FROM THE KING... AND THE ARMOURED COLUMN SET OFF.

DON LAWRENCE

BACK IN TRIGAN CITY, THE EMPEROR WAS STRIDING HIS COUNCIL CHAMBER IN A TOWERING FURY.

IF THAT SON OF MINE CHOOSES TO BEHAVE LIKE A MAD ANIMAL HE MUST BE DESTROYED LIKE A MAD ANIMAL! GIVE ORDERS TO THE AIR FLEET... WE'RE LEAVING FOR HERICON!

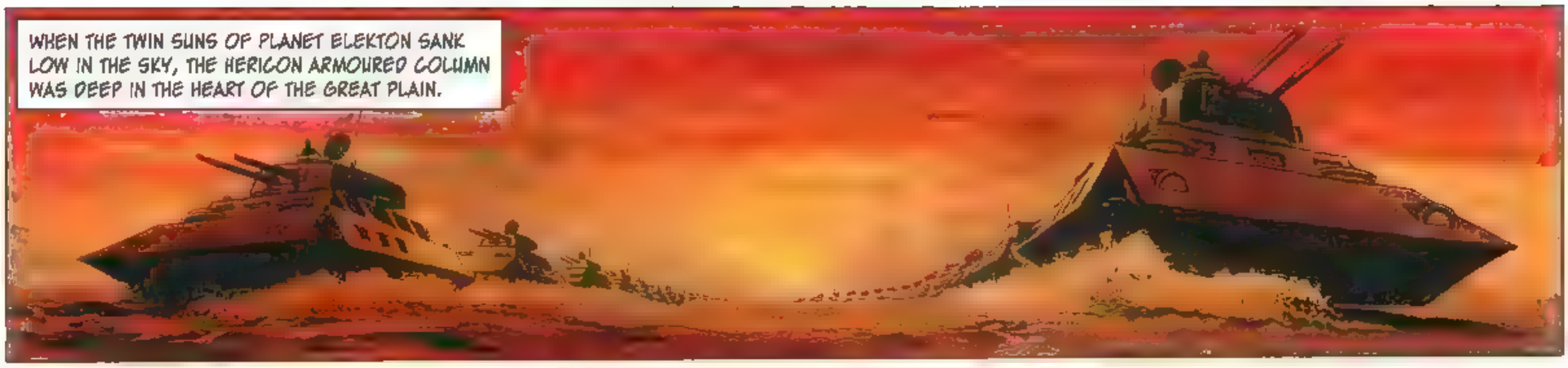
AND THEN...

IMPERIAL MAJESTY! NEWS FROM HERICON! KING NIKKO IS LEADING AN ARMOURED COLUMN TO OCCUPY THE GREAT PLAIN!

IS HE NOW? THEN, GENTLEMEN, YOU CAN *FORGET* MY LAST ORDER...

THERE WAS A GRIM SMILE ON TRIGO'S LIPS...

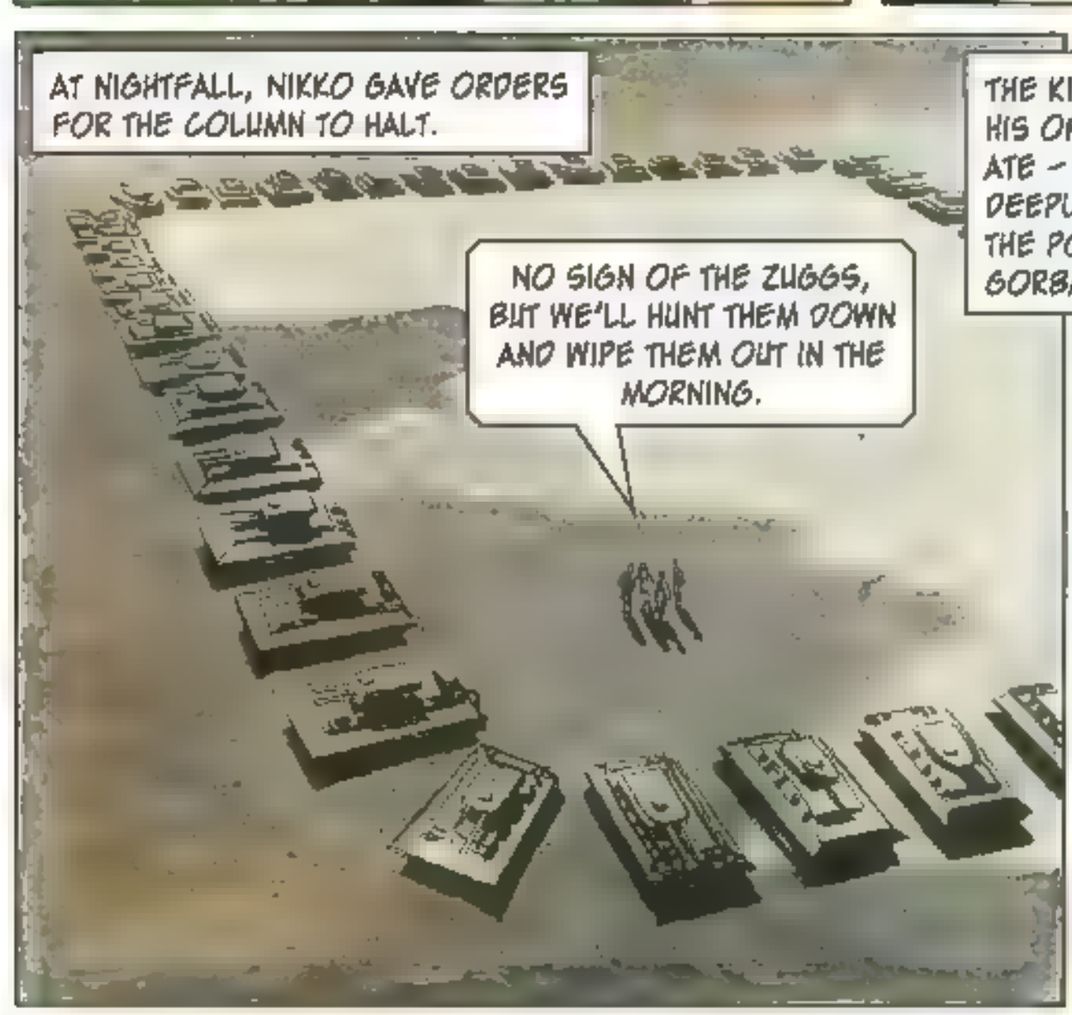
I HAVE FOUGHT THE MIGHTY ZUGG TRIBESMEN ON THE GREAT PLAIN AND I KNOW THIS... ***THE ZUGGS WILL PUNISH NIKKO FOR HIS FOLLY!***


WHEN THE TWIN SUNS OF PLANET ELEKTON SANK LOW IN THE SKY, THE HERICON ARMOURED COLUMN WAS DEEP IN THE HEART OF THE GREAT PLAIN.

ZUGG TRIBESMEN SIGHTED THE FORCE FROM A CRAGGY MOUNTAIN CREST.
CITY DWELLERS DEFILING OUR HUNTING GROUNDS!
SO MUCH THE WORSE FOR THEM!

THEY BROUGHT THE NEWS TO THEIR LEADER.
ARMOURED CRAFT ARE COMING THIS WAY, JEGIZ!
THAT WILL BE NIKKO!
THEN THE KING OF HERICON IS RIDING TO DESTRUCTION!

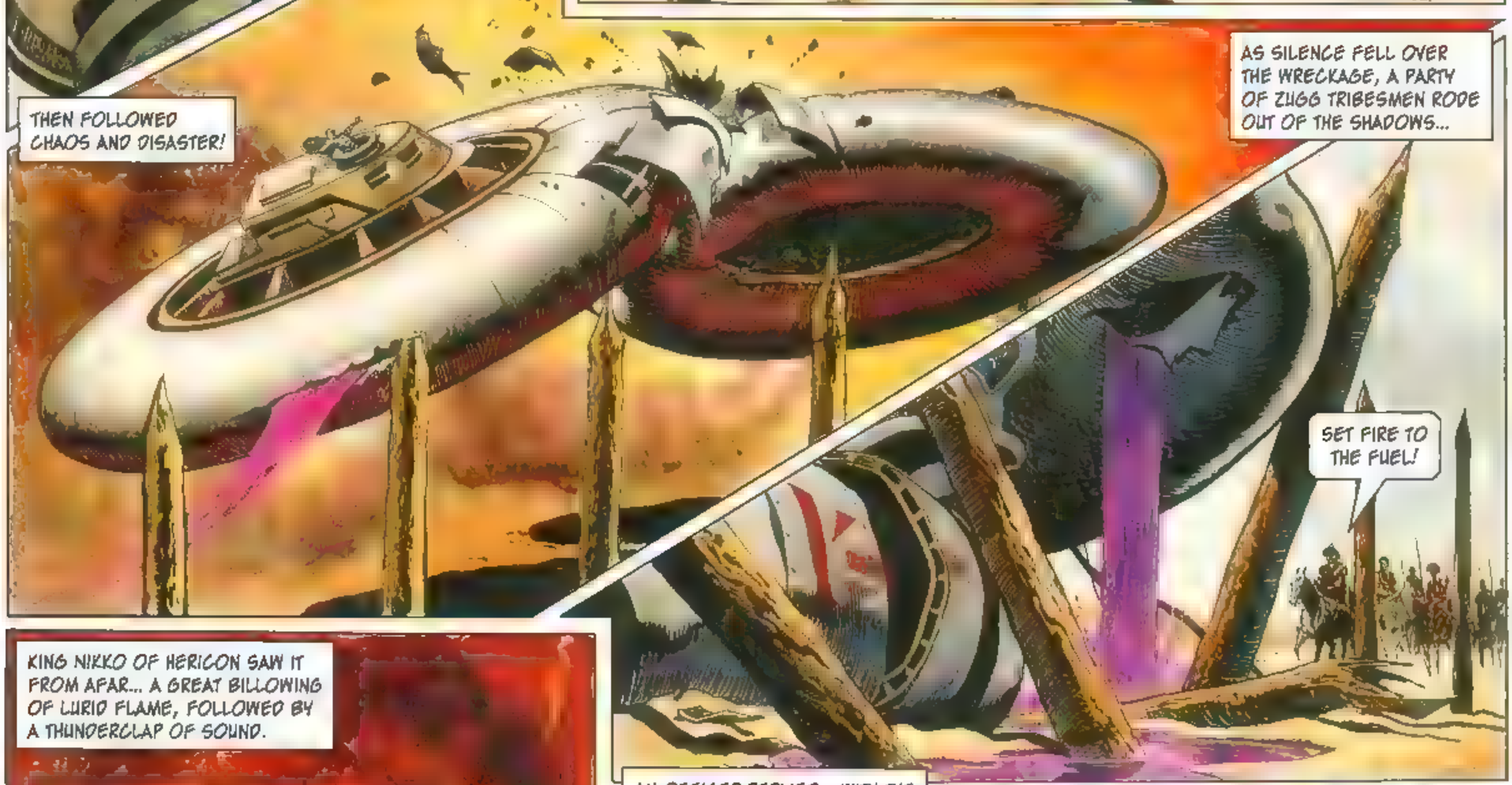
JANNO WAS NOW AN HONOURED GUEST OF THE WARRIOR-HUNTERS. HE LISTENED IN AWE AS THE ZUGG LEADER CALMLY ADDRESSED HIS MEN.
MOUNT UP! WE'VE MUCH TO DO BEFORE DAWN. YOU ALL KNOW YOUR TASKS. BY THIS TIME TOMORROW THERE WON'T BE A SINGLE HERICON ALIVE ON THE PLAINS!


AT NIGHTFALL, NIKKO GAVE ORDERS FOR THE COLUMN TO HALT.
NO SIGN OF THE ZUGGS, BUT WE'LL HUNT THEM DOWN AND WIPE THEM OUT IN THE MORNING.

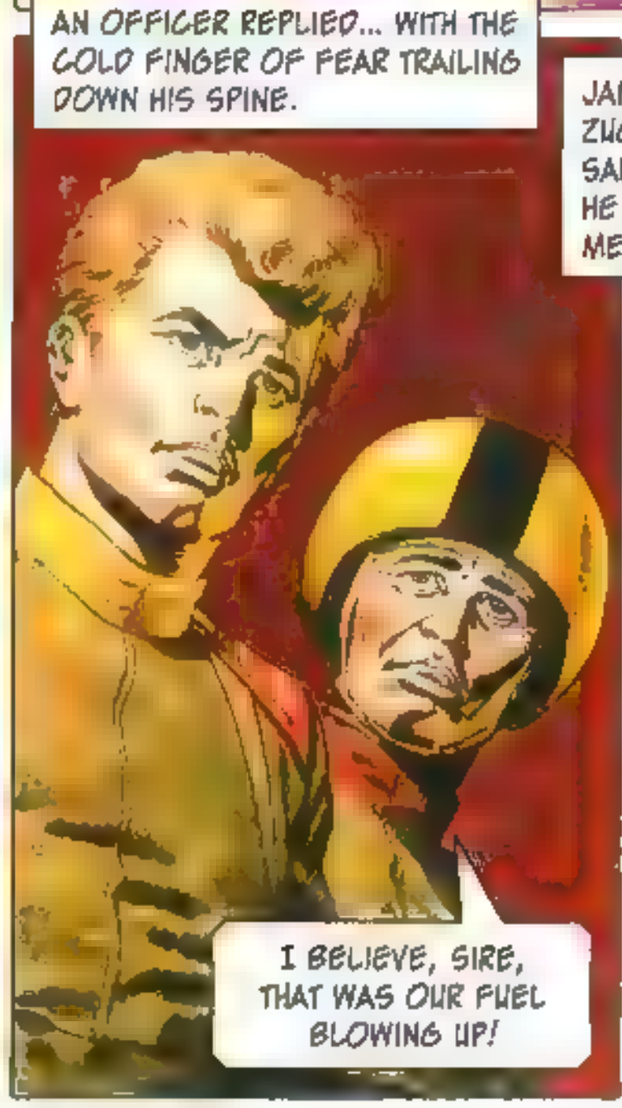
THE KING AND HIS OFFICERS ATE – AND DRANK DEEPLY OF THE POISONED GORBAL.
WHAT'S THE FUEL SITUATION, KEREN?
THE CRAFT ARE HALF-EMPTY, SIRE, BUT TWO FUEL TANKERS ARE DUE HERE BEFORE DAWN.
FAR ACROSS THE PLAIN, TWO LARGE FUEL-CARRIERS SPED ALONG.
GUNNERS! KEEP A LOOKOUT FOR ZUGG PATROLS AND SHOOT ON SIGHT!

AND THEN...
AAAAAAAAH! STOP... STOP!

A WALL OF STAKES SPRANG UP AHEAD OF THE CRAFT!


THEN FOLLOWED CHAOS AND DISASTER!
AS SILENCE FELL OVER THE WRECKAGE, A PARTY OF ZUGG TRIBESMEN RODE OUT OF THE SHADOWS...
SET FIRE TO THE FUEL!

KING NIKKO OF HERICON SAW IT FROM AFAR... A GREAT BILLOWING OF LURID FLAME, FOLLOWED BY A THUNDERCLAP OF SOUND.
BY ALL THE STARS! WHAT'S THAT?

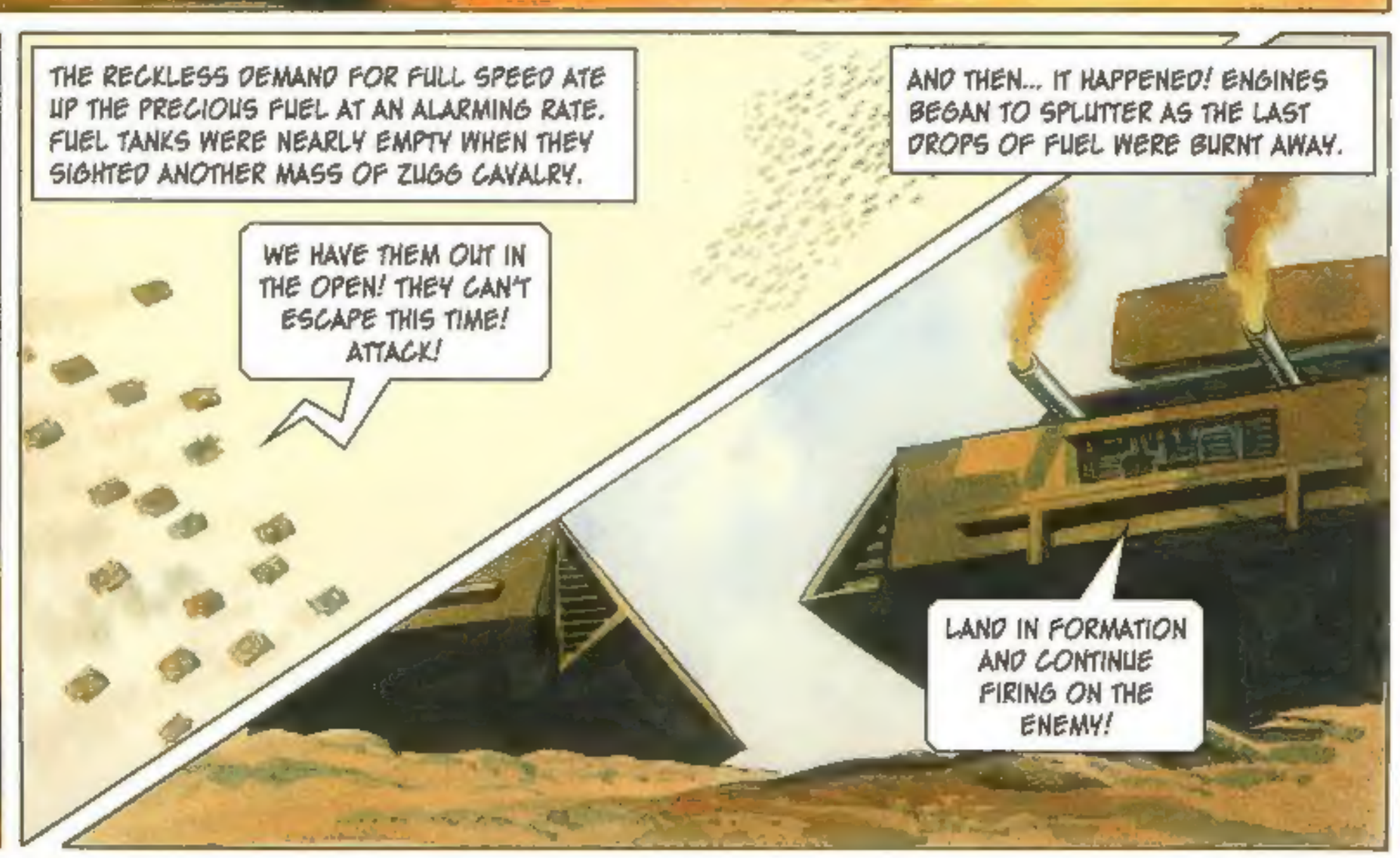

AN OFFICER REPLIED... WITH THE COLD FINGER OF FEAR TRAILING DOWN HIS SPINE.
I BELIEVE, SIRE, THAT WAS OUR FUEL BLOWING UP!

JANNO WAS WITH THE ZUGG LEADER. HE, TOO, SAW THE EXPLOSION... AND HE SHUDDERED AT JEBIZ'S MERCILESS WORDS...
TOMORROW WE'LL LEAD THEM A DANCE TILL THE REMAINDER OF THEIR FUEL HAS GONE... THEN WE'LL CLOSE IN FOR THE KILL!

AS DAWN BROKE OVER THE GREAT PLAIN, AN ALARM RANG OUT FROM THE GROUNDED HERICON COLUMN.
ZUGG FORCE IN SIGHT! HUNDREDS OF THEM!
THOUGH HIS FUEL WAS HALF GONE, NIKKO GAVE THE ORDER TO ATTACK. THE FIGHTING CRAFT STREAKED FORWARD, GUNS BLAZING...

WITH PROJECTILES BURSTING ALL ROUND THEM, THE ZUGGS WHEELED AND RODE INTO THE NARROW VALLEY... AND WERE SOON OUT OF SIGHT.

THE INCIDENT UNNERVED NIKKO. TAKING A DEEP DRAUGHT OF THE DEADLY GORBAL, HE SHOUTED ANOTHER WILD ORDER.
OPEN OUT INTO WIDE FORMATION AND INCREASE TO FULL SPEED! WE'LL SCOUT THE WHOLE PLAIN TILL WE FIND THOSE ACCURSED BARBARIANS!


THE RECKLESS DEMAND FOR FULL SPEED ATE UP THE PRECIOUS FUEL AT AN ALARMING RATE. FUEL TANKS WERE NEARLY EMPTY WHEN THEY SIGHTED ANOTHER MASS OF ZUGG CAVALRY.
WE HAVE THEM OUT IN THE OPEN! THEY CAN'T ESCAPE THIS TIME! ATTACK!
AND THEN... IT HAPPENED! ENGINES BEGAN TO SPLUTTER AS THE LAST DROPS OF FUEL WERE BURNT AWAY.
LAND IN FORMATION AND CONTINUE FIRING ON THE ENEMY!

NO SOONER DID THE HEAVY, ARMOURED HOVERCRAFT TOUCH THE GROUND THAN THEY SUNK!
AAAAAH! WE'RE IN A QUICKSAND!

WITHIN INSTANTS, THE PROUD HERICON FORCE WAS A SHAMBLES OF SINKING CRAFT AND PANIC-STRICKEN MEN!
EEEEEEEH! HE-E-ELP!

NIKKO SAW KEREN FLOUNDERING TO HIS DOOM AND GRABBED HIS ARM...

PLUNGING THROUGH THE YIELDING SAND, THE YOUNG KING FELT HIS FEET TOUCH FIRM GROUND. HE STAGGERED TO SAFETY, DRAGGING HIS BURDEN BEHIND HIM.
THANK THE STARS! WE'RE OUT OF IT, KEREN!

JEGIZ WATCHED THE DESTRUCTION OF THE COLUMN FROM A DISTANCE. THE ZUGG LEADER'S FIERCE FACE CREASED IN A GRIN OF TRIUMPH.
THEY FELL INTO OUR TRAP, JEGIZ! SHALL WE CHARGE AND WIPE OUT THE SURVIVORS?
NOT YET! LET THEM ROAST IN THE MIDDAY SUNS FOR A WHILE TILL THEY ARE TOO WEAK TO FIGHT!

NIKKO AND THE PATHETIC REMAINS OF HIS FORCE CROUCHED IN THE PITILESS HEAT OF ELEKTON'S TWIN SUNS...
HOW LONG CAN WE HOLD OUT, SIRE?
NO TIME AT ALL...

LET'S HOPE THE BARBARIANS ATTACK AND FINISH IT... BEFORE WE ALL GO MAD WITH THIRST!

WHEN THE SEARING SUNS OF THE PLANET ELEKTON REACHED THEIR ZENITH, THE MIND OF ONE OF THE HERICONS SNAPPED...
AAAAAAAAAAH! WATER! GIVE ME WATER!
COME BACK, YOU FOOL!
IT WAS THEN THAT JANNO URGED HIS KREED FORWARD AT THE GALLOP... AWAY FROM THE ZUGGS AND TOWARDS THE DOOMED HERICONS.
DON'T SHOOT, HERICONS! IT'S ME... JANNO!
REACHING THE SHALLOW HOLLOW, JANNO LEAPT TO THE GROUND AND CROUCHED BY THE ASTONISHED HERICONS.
YES, MAJESTY!
JANNO! YOU DELIBERATELY CHOSE TO PERISH WITH US... AND AFTER WHAT HAS HAPPENED?
A ZUGG ARROW SILENCED THE MAN'S CRIES FOREVER.
ANOTHER ARROW WAS DRAWN BACK... BUT JEGIZ THE ZUGG LEADER STAYED THE BOWMAN'S HAND.
DIE, TRAITOR!
NO! HE SAVED MY LIFE... LET HIM GO TO HIS OWN PEOPLE.
NO MATTER WHAT YOU'VE DONE, I AM A CITIZEN OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE AND IT IS MY DUTY TO STAND AND DIE WITH MY EMPEROR'S SON!
THE POISONOUS FUMES OF GORBAL WERE CLEARING FROM THE MINDS OF NIKKO AND HIS COMPANIONS...
WHY DID I BEGIN THIS MAD, EVIL WAR?
SIRE! YOU ORDERED... AND WE WERE GLAD TO OBEY! AND NOW WE MUST ALL PAY THE PRICE!

AND THEN...

LOOK! THE ZUGGS ARE RIDING OFF!

JEGIZ, THE ZUGG LEADER, WHEELED HIS KREED AND CAST ONE GLANCE BACKWARDS.

I WILL SPARE THEM ALL... FOR THE SAKE OF THE ONE CALLED JANNO, WHO BRAVELY CHOSE TO BE WITH THEM! NEVER AGAIN WILL THE HERICONS DEFILE OUR HUNTING GROUNDS!

HARDLY ABLE TO BELIEVE THEIR GOOD FORTUNE, NIKKO AND THE OTHER SURVIVORS DRAGGED THEMSELVES TO THEIR FEET... AND SET OFF ACROSS THE GREAT PLAIN.

THREE LUNAR MONTHS LATER, A GROUP OF BEDRAGGLED FIGURES STAGGERED INTO THE IMPERIAL COUNCIL CHAMBER OF TRIGAN CITY.

BY ALL THE STARS!

THE YOUNG KING OF HERICON PROSTRATED HIMSELF BEFORE THE EMPEROR.

MY FATHER... I BEG YOUR FORGIVENESS FOR MY CRIMES...

THERE IS NOTHING TO FORGIVE, NIKKO! YOU ARE NOT TO BLAME FOR WHAT YOU DID!

I- I DON'T UNDERSTAND...

THE EMPEROR EXPLAINED... AND A COLD CHILL OF FEAR RAN THROUGH THE BODIES OF NIKKO AND HIS COMPANIONS WHEN THEY HEARD OF THE FATE THEY HAD SO NARROWLY ESCAPED.

PERIC, HERE, HAS DISCOVERED THE SOURCE OF THE EVIL! HE FOUND THE BEVERAGE GORBAL TO BE CONTAMINATED WITH A STRANGE POISON WHICH AFFECTED YOUR MINDS AND WOULD HAVE EVENTUALLY KILLED YOU!

FROM THAT DAY, GORBAL WAS NEVER DRUNK ON THE PLANET ELEKTON!